



**Testimony  
Education Committee  
Monday, March 4, 2013**

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Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition***

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**In support of HB 6504, An Act Concerning Alternative School Programs**

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) supports HB 6504, which will create standards for alternative schools and programs. This bill is critical to ensure that alternative school programs provide students with an education equal to those of their peers in traditional public schools. Adopting HB 6504 would require no additional state funding.

Founded in 1985, BCAC is a nonprofit coalition of member organizations that advocates for policy and system changes to improve the lives of children, particularly those who are low-income. We have been working hard to ensure that students in Bridgeport receive a quality education so they can reach their full potential.

The education achievement gap between Connecticut's poorest students and its most affluent is the largest in the country. The gap is even more profound for students in alternative education programs.

Alternative schools and educational programs are viable options for students who are struggling in traditional public schools. While some alternative programs offer a high quality educational experience, others do not.

Unlike traditional public schools, alternative schools programs are not defined under state law. There is no oversight or ways to hold these programs accountable.

Alternative schools and programs are not required to collect or report data on their students' test scores, attendance, or graduation rates. They are not required to follow standards for curriculum or comply with a minimum number of instructional hours. Parental consent for transferring a student to an alternative school program is not always required. In addition, some alternative programs become "dumping grounds" for students with behavioral challenges and the students who attend them are at high risk of dropping out of school.

Because of this lack of uniformity, the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition strongly urges you to pass HB 6504 and reduce the achievement gap for students in alternative education schools and programs. HB 6504 will:

- Define alternative school programs by state statute.
- Require alternative school programs to provide a minimum number of school sessions, class hours, and instructional programs as traditional public schools.
- Require school districts to offer an alternative school program to a student under the age of 16 who is expelled, as well as to students ages 16-18 who are expelled for the first time.
- Require parental or guardian consent before a student is placed in an alternative educational program.
- Ensure that if a student with special needs is expelled, the alternative program must offer services compatible with the student's special needs.
- Require every school district to report information on alternative educational programs in its annual Strategic School Profile and on its website.
- Mandate that any instructional and operations audit of a district done by the State Department of Education include alternative education programs provided to students.

These requirements will not cost the state additional dollars. The data reporting systems are already in place.

These mandates provide critically needed safeguards for students in alternative educational programs. Adopting HB 6504, An Act Concerning Alternative School Programs, is an important and necessary step to ensure that all students in Connecticut receive an equitable education.